

The Gate-Crasher in the Front Row

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in the restaurant at the Palazzo Parigi Hotel in Milan, fresh from that morning's Giorgio Armani show. He was dressed in a colorful Sacai shirt, Nudie jeans, a Burberry trench, Prada boots and dark Céline eyeglasses. He is not an imposing figure. He's either 5-foot-3 or 5-foot-4 (he said he would have to measure himself to confirm) and, depending on how bulky the show invitation he's carrying that day, weighs a little north or just shy of 100 pounds.

As Mr. Amed recalled the dinner, it was hard not to accept the fact that he was very much among his peers, and that Mr. Amed himself would surely occupy a spot on that list of 500 if he weren't the one conjuring it up.

It has been quite the leap for a onetime fashion nobody, a former McKinsey management consultant who had gone from back-row blogger to front-row fixture in the space of just a few years.

"It's not like I ever sat in my room and said I was going to start a media company and become an editor in chief," Mr. Amed said. "It was never my dream. It was something that just happened."

There are plenty of sites dedicated to monitoring Rihanna and Cara Delevingne's Instagram accounts and the latest red carpet faux pas. The Business of Fashion isn't that.

"It's really about the ideas," Mr. Amed said. "It's not about flash or controversy." Two recent stories on the site were about Hermès's retail strategy in China and an analysis of digital sales among luxury brands.

The Business of Fashion site, which Mr. Amed started in 2007, has steadily gained a fashion-world following. Many readers get a tip sheet sent out at 6 a.m. London time (Mr. Amed compared it to The Daily Beast Cheat Sheet) that, in a chaotic and cross-continental industry, has become something of a daily destination. Ms. Massenet described it in an email as a "must read every day."

The designer Tory Burch said: "It's something I've added to the list in the last year or so. Before I actually get to reading the papers, I read it."

Born in Canada to East African parents of Indian descent, Mr. Amed studied commerce at McGill and graduated from Harvard Business School before taking a job at McKinsey & Company in 2002. He did banking in South Africa, real estate in Australia and pharmaceuticals in England.

And then, about four years into the job, he realized he was miserable. Friends encouraged him to take up meditation, but he initially resisted. It was around this time that a man from Singapore changed his life



ERIN BAIANO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Imran Amed, the editor in chief and founder of The Business of Fashion, sharing a secret with Karl Lagerfeld last month in Paris.

and set him on a course to the fashion world, Mr. Amed said.

"A man stopped me in the New Delhi airport, and he said to me he wanted to tell me some things about my life," Mr. Amed said. "I thought he was one of those kooks."

Mr. Amed listened to him anyway. The man wrote something down on a piece of paper and asked Mr. Amed to name a color and a flower, and to choose a number from one to five. Mr. Amed answered (blue, lily, three), and it was the same thing this airport seer had written down.

"This sounds really crazy, and I've never told any journalist this before, but there was some sign," he said.

Mr. Amed eventually set off on a mediation retreat, and quit his job from McKinsey in 2006. He wanted to break into a creative field, but he wasn't sure which one. He most certainly was not a fashion nut ("I didn't read Vogue," he said), and his only exposure to the industry was what he saw on television. "Fashion was really impenetrable to me," he said.

But he had a friend who took him to some London fashion shows, where he would "stand by the wall and watch," he said.

He got an idea and started meeting with young designers. He diagnosed a problem that many fashion companies (and groups like the Council of Fashion Designers of America) diagnosed around the same time: Designers were bursting with ideas but were often disasters as businesspeople.

"I knew about Robert Duffy," he said, referring to Marc Jacobs's longtime business partner, "and I thought, 'Well, maybe I could be the Robert Duffy to a designer.'"

One of his early meetings was with a young Spanish designer named Rafael Lopez.

"He had Kylie Minogue and all these celebrities wearing his stuff," he said. "But he had no idea how to translate that into a business."

Mr. Amed got funding for a start-up to help young designers, but it closed months later.

Looking for his next move after that setback, he went to the McKinsey alumni directory and searched for LVMH, one of the biggest fashion companies in the world. He found a name of a former McKinseyite: Mr. Roussel, the soon-to-be chief executive of the fashion group. He reached out and got a meeting. Within days, he had a six-

month contract. Their business relationship lasted six years.

"We are super-connected in Paris, but we weren't that connected in London as much at the time," Mr. Roussel said in an interview. "I thought it would have been useful to have someone based in London that could connect with that generation of emerging designers."

On the side, Mr. Amed started writing a blog. He called it The Business of Fashion, but it had an ungainly web address: uberkid.typepad.com. The blog was used to prop up his budding fashion consulting business.

But not many people clicked on his site. In an early post, he thanked the 65 people who filled out a reader survey. "People weren't reading it," he said. "It was my little blog."

And yet, there were indications that it was finding the right audience. Seven years ago, he got an unexpected invitation to the Oscar de la Renta show in New York. He wound up arriving late and missed the show, but afterward he was ushered to meet with Alex Bolen, Mr. de la Renta's son-in-law and the chief executive of the label.

"I met Alex, and he's like, 'So, you're The Business of Fashion,'" Mr. Amed recalled. "He said, 'I'm sorry you were late because I saved you a seat next to me in the front row.' It was kind of this weird moment. He was one of the very first major leaders in the industry to discover it, and he told me he was reading it on his BlackBerry in the morning while walking his dog in Central Park."

The site grew steadily over the years. As traffic ticked up (and the appropriate web address was acquired: businessoffashion.com), he decided to call off his consulting business and invest in the site full time. In 2013, he raised \$2.5 million from a group of investors. He has a team of 13 people working for him now. He said that the site averages about 400,000 unique readers a month.

Mr. Amed said he wants his site to be perceived as free of any outside influence. "What Business of Fashion is known for in the industry is being independent," he said.

But independence only goes so far in the often-chummy world of fashion.

When Mr. Amed told LVMH's Mr. Roussel that he was ending his contract, his mentor said he would like to invest in his new venture. Mr. Amed said that it gave him pause.

"I wasn't sure," Mr. Amed said. "Obviously it was fine when Business of Fashion was a little blog, but I wasn't trying to build a business out of it to have such a close relationship with LVMH."

He wound up taking the money from LVMH. "It was not that much," said Mr. Roussel, who added that LVMH's contribution had less to do with a "financial investment" and more with "helping a friend."

The LVMH executive was featured in a glowing profile in the latest print issue of The Business of Fashion. (Under the headline the "Fashion Alchemist," Mr. Roussel is described as having an "uncommon blend of operational excellence and sensitivity for 'creative casting.'" Mr. Amed did not write the article.) The article in the print edition, which comes out twice a year, did not include a disclosure about the role Mr. Roussel played in the editor's life ("He became a very important mentor to me," Mr. Amed said) or LVMH's investment in the site.

Mr. Amed said that it was an oversight



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VALERIO MEZZANOTTI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mr. Amed, at the Sacai show last month in Paris. At the first fashion shows he attended, he would "stand by the wall and watch."

— a disclosure about LVMH's investment has since been published at the bottom of the article on the website, as is the usual practice for the site — and that he was proud of the article.

"That issue is about celebrating people we think are doing exceptional things in the industry," he said. "It just so happens that one of those people is someone I had a relationship with for many years."

But Mr. Amed has a lot of friends like these in the industry now. And plenty more are waiting in the wings, especially with a power list that is making Mr. Amed into this world's mini-Graydon Carter, an arbiter of who's up and who's down.

At that dinner last month — and at an event in Paris two weeks later, where Karl Lagerfeld dropped by and schmoozed with Mr. Amed — he took stock in just how far he's come.

"Domenico De Sole walked up to me and said hello," Mr. Amed said, referring to Tom Ford's longtime business partner, whom he had never met before. "We did a case study on his work and Tom Ford's work at Harvard. In the case, and I'll never forget it, they were referred to as Tom and Dom. And all of a sudden he's the first person who greets me at our event. And I said, 'Wow, you're Domenico De Sole!' He said, 'I can't stay for dinner but I wanted to make an effort to come.'"

"That's how the evening started," Mr. Amed continued. "That was the reality-check moment. Like, 'Wow, that's the guy from that case I studied at business school.'"